

WEEKLY INFORMATION PACKET

TO: Mayor Ruzzin and Members of the City Council

FROM: Frank Bruno, City Manager
Stephanie Grainger, Assistant City Manager
Peter Pollock, Director of Planning
Maureen Rait, Director of Public Works for Development & Support Services

DATE: May 19, 2005

SUBJECT: Planning & Development Services – Update on Customer Service Initiatives

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Further improvements to internal business processes and codes remain priorities for implementation in Planning & Development Services (P&DS). Customer feedback is used to guide changes in service delivery. The Land Use Code Simplification Project is one example of a customer service initiative. Additionally, P&DS strives to make more services available online, and several Web-based applications are planned for implementation in June 2005. One of these applications, the Code Enforcement Report Form, has generated some local discussion. This memorandum provides the City Council with an update on various improvements that have recently been implemented or are underway. Some background information about P&DS and the Services Center is also provided.

BACKGROUND:

Planning and Development Services (P&DS) consists of the Planning Department and portions of the Public Works Department. P&DS is a service area and a fund that was formed in recognition of the importance of coordinating development-related activities.

The use and development of land in Boulder is subject to city review and approval. The city review processes fall under two general headings: By-right and Discretionary. By-right development meets minimum city requirements and is reviewed through the building permit process. Discretionary projects are evaluated in the development review process. The latter involves more complex development and some type of variation to the land use regulations in order to further the goals of the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan.

The management team for P&DS includes:

Jeff Arthur, Engineering Review Manager
Bob Cole, Land Use Review Manager
Ruth McHeyser, Long Range Planning Manager

Corey Schmidt, Chief Building Official
Terry Stonich, Information Resources Manager
Mary Ann Weideman, Administrative Services Manager

Peter Pollock is responsible for the management of the Planning Department. Maureen Rait is responsible for the management of the Development & Support Services division of the Public Works Department. Internal service functions (administrative services and information resources) are jointly managed.

The P&DS Services Center supports the integration of many of our services and responsibilities. With 67 percent of the revenue to the P&DS fund coming from fees for development-related applications and permits, customer service in this area remains a priority. Understanding the operational issues of this services center helps provide a foundation for assessing service delivery and identifying areas for further improvement.

P&DS SERVICES CENTER:

Although the services center was officially opened in 2000, efforts to improve service delivery in this area have been underway since 1997 when Planning, Public Works and Information Technology (IT) developed specifications and evaluated vendors for development information and tracking software. That effort was initiated because Planning and Public Works wanted an integrated solution for tracking information from the initial development review application through the construction and occupancy of buildings. It was also recognized that code enforcement activities needed to be integrated.

To automate workflow and improve access to information, Boulder acquired Tidemark's permitting software (LandLink). This system was subsequently integrated with ESRI's ArcView GIS software (MapLink) and an imaging interface (Content Manager). The development and implementation of these systems was a key step towards the establishment of the P&DS Services Center.

The services center format assists in facilitating customer service by enabling the city to centralize application intake and provide the technically trained staff to be responsive to customer needs by conducting a more comprehensive and efficient review of applications. Services center functions also include reception, permit processing, cashiering, mapping & records, telephone support and self-help areas. Our work efforts at the services center and throughout P&DS have focused in three basic areas:

Management of Systems and Processes

Objective: Make processes more comprehensible and predictable, automate manual systems, update existing automated systems, and integrate systems.

Management of Records and Information

Objective: Make records and information accessible to the customers and staff

Management of Staff

Objective: Make customer service a priority; focus on attitudes and accountabilities

CUSTOMER SERVICE INITIATIVES:

P&DS receives feedback about service delivery from surveys, customer comment cards and from individual outreach efforts to customers. Customers provide staff with direct and specific feedback that guides the work program and priorities for improvements.

Staff training and development remain a focus for P&DS. Additionally, improvements to systems and processes, some of which impact regulations, and records and information are ongoing. These improvements have assisted in managing workload demands as resources have been reduced. A summary of recent efforts, undertaken in response to customer feedback, are outlined below.

Land Use Code Simplification

Issue: Complexity and difficulty of use of Land Use Regulations adversely impacts development costs, review times, customer and staff resources.

Improvement Initiative: Dedication of FTE to multi-year effort to organize, clarify and streamline regulations. Detailed project information available at:

<http://www.ci.boulder.co.us/buildingservices/codes/simplify/index.html>

Technical Document Review

Issue: Process is perceived as being redundant and as adversely impacting review times.

Improvement Initiative: Staff continues to make adjustments while also continuing to solicit feedback about changes. For example, Planning has adopted a policy similar to Public Works where technical documents receive an approval “stamp” and are included by applicant in permit set to avoid duplicate review. We are also evaluating the merits of concurrent technical document and permit review while taking into consideration that the process was originally created in response to development community concerns about the interface between land use review and permitting.

Development Review Slot System

Issue: Administrative Development Review, Land Use Review, and Technical Document Review application volume frequently exceeds staff review capacity. Customer concerns include the predictability of review times and fair system of prioritization.

Improvement Initiative: Developed and implemented a prioritization system based on project characteristics and review capacity.

P&DS In-Service Days

Issue: Building permit review service standards not being consistently met, particularly during peak periods.

Improvement Initiative: Introduced “In-Service Days” (closed for business, except for inspections) to focus resources on permit review and business process improvements.

Self Help

Issue: P&DS Web site and many application materials difficult to use. Significant interest expressed in checking permit status on-line.

Improvement Initiative: Some application and brochure upgrades recently completed. Others application and brochure updates underway. A major Web site upgrade is currently underway. The following E-Government applications are planned for implementation in June 2005:

- **Building Permit Status** – This application will enable customers to query, via the Web, their permit application and find out about the status of the permit, status of the fees, (paid and due), and the inspections that are required, scheduled and/or completed.
- **Property GIS Mapping** - This application will provide the same interactive GIS mapping information that customers currently receive when they visit the P&DS Service Center.
- **Property Information Report** – This application will provide the same property search capabilities that customers currently receive when they visit the P&DS Service Center including the ability to research a property’s development approval history.
- **Code Enforcement Report Form** – This application provides customers with a centralized location for reporting potential code violations and prompts customers to provide information necessary for staff to follow up on a complaint.

With the local interest in the Code Enforcement Report Form, it is important to note that these Website changes were prioritized based on customers’ most frequent requests. Currently, 52 percent of code enforcement activity is complaint initiated (over 2,400 cases/year); 48 percent of code enforcement is officer-initiated. Currently, complaints are made via e-mail and telephone. Staff does not anticipate increased reporting. Instead, the proposed system should be more efficient by providing staff with complete information upfront and requiring less staff time to follow up with customers to obtain necessary information. The city Website will also continue to provide suggestions for being a “Good Neighbor” and a link to the city’s Conflict Resolution/Mediation Services.

Timekeeping

Issue: Limited data available to related to review (staff) time and review fees. Perceived inequitable distribution of review costs between applications of varying quality and complexity.

Improvement Initiative: Developed and implemented system to track staff time down to 15-minute intervals. Use of data to analyze resource allocation and adjust cost of service information accordingly. Developed and implemented an hourly billing system for application revisions to allocate costs to projects with greatest impacts on review resources.

Credit Card Payments

Issue: Customers requested more flexibility in payment methods for application, permit, and other fees.

Improvement Initiative: Customers have the option to use a credit card for payment of fees up to \$2,500.

Skip- A-Trip

Issue: Customers requested a more efficient process to apply for and receive simple permits without having to come to the Services Center.

Improvement Initiative: Customers have the opportunity to apply for electrical, mechanical, mobile home, and roofing permits via fax with a staff response within 48 hours. Customers may also apply for mechanical (residential only) permits online and receive an immediate response.

Parking

Issue: Difficult for customers to find parking for P&DS Service Center

Improvement Initiative: Installed parking meters to improve space turnover.

Pre-Application Meetings

Issue: High service delivery cost subsidized by application fees.

Improvement Initiative: Adjusted program to tailor pre-application services depending on project and applicant questions. Requests are now handled through a combination of pre-application meetings, telephone responses, written responses, and front counter services.

Project Specialist Telephone Response Times

Issue: Telephone response times for calls to Project Specialist not meeting service standards.

Improvement Initiative: Minimum of one Project Specialist now assigned to phone responses including periods when not all Specialists are available. Log regularly monitored and staffing adjustments made as necessary to more consistently hit response time standards.

Automated Telephone System

Issue: Difficult for customers to navigate the system.

Improvement Initiative: Revising the system to more clearly identify service areas and how to obtain assistance (*to be completed summer 2005*).

Inspection Request System

Issue: Customers are unable to schedule certain inspections due to pre-determined criteria that may or may not apply. Messages cannot be left about access to a building, specific inspection location, etc. The open-ended time frame for inspection requests has led to some inefficiency.

Improvement Initiative: Revising the system to address the concerns identified by our customers (*to be completed during fall/winter 2005*).

Revocable Permit and Lease Program

Issue: The business process for this program is cumbersome and inefficient.

Improvement Initiative: The business process for this program has been streamlined and recently automated. All files have been fully documented and are in the process of being entered into a

new database. Investigations about potential encroachments into the right-of-way without a permit or lease have begun.

Public Notice

Issue: Limited information in public notices result in confusion and project opposition absent relevant facts.

Improvement Initiative: Improved signage and mailing information to address concerns earlier in the process.

In summary, P&DS remains committed to providing quality customer service on behalf of the Boulder community. In keeping with the philosophy of the city's business plan, recent improvement efforts also reflect the importance of continuing to achieve greater efficiencies given resource constraints.

Please contact either Peter Pollock or Maureen Rait if there are questions about Planning & Development Services or recent customer service initiatives.